Garland Hamlin

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I
HER CHILDHOOD

Rose was an unaccountable child from the start. She learned to speak early and while she did not use "baby-talk" she had strange words of her own. She called hard money "tow" and a picture "tac," names which had nothing to do with onomatop[oe]ia though it seemed so in some cases. Bread and milk she called "plop."

She began to read of her own accord when four years old, picking out the letters from the advertisements of the newspapers, and running to her mother at the sink or bread-board to learn what each word meant. Her demand for stories grew to be a burden. She was insatiate, nothing but sleep subdued her eager brain.

As she grew older she read and re-read her picture books when alone, but when older people were talking she listened as attentively as if she understood every word. She had the power of amusing herself and visited very little with other children. It was deeply moving to see her with her poor playthings out under the poplar tree, talking to herself, arranging and rearranging her chairs and tables, the sunlight flecking her hair, and the birds singing overhead.

She seemed only a larger sort of insect, and her prattle mixed easily with the chirp of crickets and the rustle of leaves.

She was only five years old when her mother suddenly withdrew her hands from pans and kettles, gave up all thought of bread and butter making, and took rest in death. Only a few hours of waiting on her bed near the kitchen fire and Ann Dutcher was through with toil and troubled dreaming, and lay in the dim best-room, taking no account of anything in the light of day.

Rose got up the next morning after her mother's last kiss and went into the room where the body lay. A gnomish little figure the child was, for at that time her head was large and her cropped hair bristled till she seemed a sort of brownie. Also, her lonely child-life had given her quaint, grave ways.

She knew her mother was dead, and that death was a kind of sleep which lasted longer than common sleep, that was all the difference, so she went in and stood by the bed and tried to see her mother's face. It was early in the morning and the curtains being drawn it was dark in the room, but Rose had no fear, for mother was there.

She talked softly to herself a little while, then went over to the window and pulled on the string of the curtain till it rolled up. Then she went back and looked at her mother. She grew tired of waiting at last.

"Mamma," she called, "wake up. Can't you wake up, mamma?"

She patted the cold, rigid cheeks with her rough brown little palms. Then she blew in the dead face, gravely. Then she thought if she could only open mamma's eyes she'd be awake. So she took her finger and thumb and tried to lift the lashes, and when she did she was frightened by the look of the set faded gray eyes. Then the terrible vague shadow of the Unknown settled upon her and she cried convulsively: "Mamma! mamma, I want you!" Thus she met death, early in her life.

After her mother's burial Rose turned to her father more hungrily than before. She rode into the fields with him in the spring, when he went out to sow, sitting on the seeder box with the pockets of her little pink apron filled with wheat, and her sweet, piping little voice calling to the horses or laughing in glee at the swarms of sparrows. When he was plowing corn she rode on the horses, clinging like a blue-jay to the rings in the back-pad, her yellow-brown hair blowing.

She talked sagely about the crops and the weather, and asked innumerable questions. Often John could not hear her questions, which were like soft soliloquies, but she babbled on just the same.

"See the little birds, pappa John. They's 'bout a million of 'um, ain't they? They're glad spring has come, ain't they, pappa? They can understand each other just the same as we can, can't they, pappa John?"

John Dutcher was not a talker, and he seldom answered her unless she turned her eager face to him, and her bird-like voice repeated her question. But it mattered very little to Rose. She had her father's power of self-amusement. In case she got tired of riding about with him she brought her playthings out and established them in a corner of the fence. Her favorite game was playing horses.

Her horses were sticks of the size of canes, and of all sorts and colors. Each one had a name. How she selected them, and why she selected them out of the vast world of sticks, was a mystery to John Dutcher.

The brown stick she called Dan, the fork handle, Nellie, and the crooked stick with the big knot was Barney. She had from six to ten and she never forgot their names. Each had a string for a bridle and they all were placed in stalls, which she built with infinite labor and calculation out of twigs. She led each stick by its halter up to the manger (a rail) on which she had placed oats and grass. She talked to them.

"Now, Barney, whoa-whoa there now! Don't you kick Kit again – now sir! Kit, you better stand over here by Pete – Barney, you need exercise, that's what you need – yessir."

She exercised them by riding them in plunging circles about the fields, forgetting, with the quick imagination of a child, that she was doing all the hard work of the riding with her own stout, brown legs. It was a pleasure to John to have her there though he said little to her.

Often at night as he saw her lying asleep, her long lashes upon her roughened sun-burned skin, his heart went out to her in a great gush of tenderness. His throat ached and his eyes grew wet as he thought how unresponsive he had been that day. His remorseful memory went back over her eager questions to which he had not replied. Dear, sweet, restless little heart! And then he vowed never to lose patience with her again. And sometimes standing there beside her bed his arms closed about the little mound under the quilts, and his lips touched the round, sleep-enraptured face. At such times his needy soul went out in a cry to his dead wife for help to care for his child.

He grew afraid of the mystery and danger of coming womanhood. Her needs came to him more powerfully each day.

When she began going to school with the other children the effects of her lonely life and of her companionship with her father set her apart from the boys and girls of her own age and placed her among those several years older, whom she dominated by her gravity and her audacity. She was not mischievous or quarrelsome, but she was a fearless investigator. She tested their childish superstitions at once.

When they told her that if she swore at God and shook her fist at the sky she would certainly drop dead, she calmly stepped forward and shook her little fist up at the sun and swore, while the awe-stricken children cowered like a covey of partridges.

"There! you see *that's* a lie," she said scornfully. "God can't kill me – or else he don't care."

She went on exploding these strange superstitious fancies, which are only the survivals in civilized children of savage ancestry. She stood erect in the door of the school-house when she was eight years old, and pointed her hand at the lightning while the teacher sat cowed and weeping at her desk.

"You said I dassn't," the little elf cried, "But I dass't, and nothing ain't struck me yet."

Her absolute fearlessness of the things which children shrank from, the dark, and things of the dark, made her a marked figure. The women of the Coolly thought it due to the lack of a mother's care. They spoke to the minister about it and urged him to see Dutcher and ask him to try and do something for the child's good.

But Dutcher simply said, "Oh, don't bother the child about her soul. She's all right. I don't bother myself about those things, and what's the use o' spoilin' the child's fun. If she wants to go to Sunday-school, why all right. She'll go where she's interested."

"But, Brother Dutcher, the child is doing outrageous things – heathenish, defying her God."

"I don't s'pose what she does will make any particular difference to God. We understand each other, Rosie and me. Don't worry. If she does anything real bad she'll come an' tell me of it. *Chk! Chk!* G' wan, Barney!" He cut the matter short by driving away into the field of corn.

He saw rushing upon him the most solemn and severe trials of a parent. Rose was a sturdy girl and promised to develop into a maiden early, and there were a hundred things which ought to be said to her which must be said by some one. He was not philosopher enough to know that she held in her expanding brain the germs of self-knowledge.

He had been passing through a running fire of questions from the child for two years, but these questions now took hold of deeper things, and they could no longer be put aside by saying, "Wait a few years and then I'll tell you." She would learn them elsewhere, if not from him. He braced himself for the trial, which increased in severity.

The child's horizon was limited, but within its circle her searching eyes let nothing escape. She came to Dutcher with appalling questions.

She not only asked him, "Who made God?" but she wanted to know how she came to be born, and a thousand other questions of the same searching nature. He saw that the day of petty fictions had gone by. The child knew that little lambs, and calves, and kittens did not grow down in the woods. She knew that babies were not brought by the doctor, and that they did not come from heaven.

"Good Lord!" groaned her father one day, after an unusually persistent attack from her, caused by the appearance of a little colt out in the barn, "I wish your mother was here, or some woman. You do make it hard for me, Rosie."

"How do I make it hard for you, pappa?" was her quick new question. "O, Lord, what a young un," he said, in deeper despair. "Come, ain't it about time for you to be leggin' it toward school? Give me a rest, Rosie. But I'll answer all your questions – don't ask about them things of the children – come right to me always – only don't pile 'em all on me to once."

"All right, pappa, I won't."

"That's a good old soul!" he said, patting her on the back. After she had gone he sat down on the feed-box and wiped his face. "I wonder how women do explain things like that to girls," he thought. "I'll ask the preacher's wife to explain it – no, I won't. I'll do it myself, and I'll get her books to read about it – good books."

It was evidence of the girl's innate strength and purity of soul that the long succession of hired hands had not poisoned her mind. They soon discovered, however, the complete confidence between the father and child, and knew that their words and actions would be taken straight to John as soon as night came and Rose climbed into his lap. This made them careful before her, and the shame of their words and stories came to the child's ears only in fragments.

Dutcher concluded that he should have a woman in the house, and so sent back to Pennsylvania for his sister, lately widowed. Rose looked forward to seeing her aunt with the wildest delight. She went with her father down the valley to Bluff Siding to meet her. Bluff Siding was the only town the child knew, and it was a wonderful thing to go to town.

As they stood on the platform, waiting, her eyes swept along the great curve of the rails to the east, and suddenly, like a pain in the heart, came her first realization of distance, of the infinity of the world.

"Where does it go to, pappa?"

"O, a long way off. To Madison, Chicago, and Pennsylvany."

"How far is it? Could we go there with old Barney and Nell?"

"O, no. If we drove there it would take us days and days, and the wheat would grow up and get yellow, an' the snow come, almost, before we'd get there."

"O, dear!" she sighed. "I don't like to have it so big. Do people live all along the whole way?"

"Yes, the whole way, and lots of big cities."

"Big as Madison?" Madison was her unseen measure of greatness.

"O, yes. A hundred times bigger."

She sighed again and looked away to the east with a strange, unchildish, set stare in her eyes. She was trying to realize it.

"It makes me ache, pappa," she sighed, putting her little brown hand to her throat.

When the engine came in with its thunder and whizz, she shrank back against the station wall, white and breathless, not so much with fear as with awe. She had never stood so close to this monster before. It attracted all her attention so that for the moment she forgot about the coming of her aunt.

When she looked into the large dull face of Mrs. Diehl she was deeply disappointed. She liked her but she not love her!

She had looked forward to her coming almost as if to the return of her mother. She had imagined her looking strange and beautiful because she came out of the mystical, far-off land her father often spoke of. Instead of these things Mrs. Diehl was a strong-featured, mild-voiced woman, rather large and ungraceful, who looked upon the motherless child and clicked her tongue – tch!

"You poor chick!"

But the thing which had happened was this: Rose had conceived of distance and great cities.

The next day she said: "Pappa John, I want to go way up on the bluffs. I want to go up to Table Rock where I can see way, way off."

"It's a long climb up there, Rosie. You'll get tired."

But Rosie insisted and together they climbed the hill. Up beyond the pasture – beyond the black-berry patch – beyond the clinging birches in their white jackets – up where the rocks cropped out of the ground and where curious little wave-worn pebbles lay scattered on the scant grass.

Once a glittering rattle-snake lying in the sun awoke, and slipped under a stone like a stream of golden oil, and the child shrank against her father's thigh in horror.

They climbed slowly up the steep grassy slope and stood at last on the flat rock which topped the bluff. Rose stood there, dizzy, out of breath, with her hair blown across her cheek and looked away, at the curving valley and its river gleaming here and there through the willows and elders. It was like looking over an unexplored world to the child. Her eyes expanded and her heart filled with the same ache which came into it when she looked down along the curving railway track. She turned suddenly and fell sobbing against her father.

"Why, Rosie, what's the matter? Poor little girl – she's all tired out, climbin' up here." He sat down and took her on his lap and talked to her of the valley below and where the river went – but she would not look up again.

"I want to go home," she said with hidden face.

On the way down, John rolled a big stone down the hill and as it went bounding, crashing into the forest below, a deer drifted out like a gray shadow and swept along the hillside and over the ridge.

Rose saw it as if in a dream. She did not laugh nor shout. John was troubled by her silence and gravity, but laid it to weariness and took her pick-a-back on the last half mile through the brush.

That scene came to her mind again and again in the days which followed, but she did not see it again till the following spring. It appealed to her with less power then. Its beauty over-shadowed its oppressive largeness. As she grew older it came to be her favorite playing ground on holidays. She brought down those quaint little bits of limestone and made them her playthings in her house, which was next door to her barn – and secondary to her barn.

CHAPTER II
CHILD-LIFE, PAGAN FREE

Rose lived the life of the farm girls in the seven great Middle-West States. In summer she patted away to school, clad only in a gingham dress, white untrimmed cotton pantalets, and a straw hat that was made feminine by a band of gay ribbon. Her body was as untrammeled as a boy's. She went bare-foot and bare-headed at will, and she was part of all the sports.

She helped the boys snare gophers, on the way to school, and played house with the girls on the shady side of the school-house, and once, while the teacher was absent at noon, Rose proposed that a fire be built to heat the tea for the dolls.

She it was who constructed the stove out of thin bricks, and set a fire going in it in the corner of the boy's entry-way, and only the passing of a farmer saved the building from disaster.

She it was who found the ground-bird's nest and proposed to make a house over it, and ended by teaching the bird to walk through a long hallway made of sticks in order to get to its eggs again.

She despised hats and very seldom wore hers except hanging by the string down her back. Her face was brown and red as leather, and her stout little hands were always covered with warts and good brown earth, which had no terrors for her.

Bugs and beetles did not scare her any more than they did the boys. She watched the beetles bury a dead gopher without the slightest repugnance; indeed, she turned to, after a long time, to help them, a kindness which they very probably resented, to judge from their scrambling.

She always urged the other girls to go down to the creek and see the boys go in swimming, and would have joined the fun had not the boys beaten her back with hands full of mud, while they uttered opprobrious cries. She saw no reason why boys should have all the fun.

When the days were hot they could go down there in the cool, nice creek, strip and have a good time, but girls must primp around and try to keep nice and clean. She looked longingly at the naked little savages running about and splashing in the water. There was something so fine and joyous in it, her childish heart rebelled at sex-distinction as she walked slowly away. She, too, loved the feel of the water and the caress of the wind.

She was a good student and developed early into a wonderful speller and reader. She always listened to the classes in reading, and long before she reached the pieces herself she knew them by heart, and said them to herself in the silence of the lane or the loneliness of the garret. She recited "The Battle of Waterloo" and "Locheil" long before she understood the words. The roll of the verse excited her, and she thrust her nut of a fist into the air like Miriam the Hebrew singer, feeling vaguely the same passion.

She went from Primer to First Reader, then to the Second and Third Readers, without effort. She read easily and dramatically. She caught at the larger meanings, and uttered them in such wise that the older pupils stopped their study to listen.

Scraps and fragments of her reading took curious lodgment in her mind. New conceptions burst into her consciousness with a golden glory upon reading these lines:

"Field of wheat so full and fair,
Shining with a sunny air;
Lightly swaying either way,
Graceful as the breezes sway."

They made her see the beauty of the grainfield as never before. It seemed to be lit by some mysterious light.

"Cleon hath a million acres,
Ne'er a one have I,"

seemed to express something immemorial and grand. She seemed to see hills stretching to vast distances, covered with cattle. "The pied frog's orchestra" came to her with sudden conscious meaning as she sat on the door-step one night eating her bowl of bread and milk, and watching the stars come out. These fragments of literature expressed the poetry of certain things about her, and helped her also to perceive others.

She was a daring swinger, and used to swing furiously out under the maple trees, hoping to some day touch the branches high up there, and, when her companions gathered in little clumps in dismayed consultation, she swung with wild hair floating free, a sort of intoxication of delight in her heart.

Sometimes when alone she slipped off her clothes and ran amid the tall corn-stalks like a wild thing. Her slim little brown body slipped among the leaves like a weasel in the grass. Some secret, strange delight, drawn from ancestral sources, bubbled over from her pounding heart, and she ran and ran until wearied and sore with the rasping corn leaves, then she sadly put on civilized dress once more.

Her feet were brown as toads, but graceful and small, and she washed them (when the dew was heavy enough) by running in the wet grass just before going in to bed, a trick the boys of the neighborhood had taught her. She ran forward to clean the insteps and backward to clean the heels. If the grass was not wet, she omitted the ceremony. Dust was clean anyhow. Her night-gowns were of most sorry pattern till her aunt came; thereafter they were clean, though it mattered little. They were a nuisance anyway.

She wore a pink sun-bonnet, when she could find one; generally there were two or three hanging on the fences at remote places. She sat down in the middle of the road, because she had a lizard's liking for the warm soft dust, and she paddled in every pool and plunged her hand into every puddle after frogs and bugs and worms, with the action of a crane.

She ate everything that boys did. That is to say, she ate sheep sorrel, Indian tobacco, roots of ferns, May apples, rose leaves, rose-buds, raw turnips, choke-cherries, wild crab-apples, slippery elm bark, and the green balls on young oak trees, as well as the bitter acorns. These acorns she chewed into pats, and dried in the sun, to eat at other times, like a savage.

She ate pinks and grass blades, and green watermelons, and ground cherries, and black-haws, and dew-berries, and every other conceivable thing in the woods and fields, not to mention the score of things which she tried and spit out. She became inured to poison ivy like the boys and walked the forest paths without fear of anything but snakes.

Summer was one continuous and busy play-spell for her in those days before her lessons became a serious thing, for as she sat in school she was experimenting in the same way. She chewed paper into balls and snapped them like the boys. She carried slips of elm bark to chew also, and slate pencils she crunched daily. She gnawed the corners of her slate, tasted her ink and munched the cedar of her pencil.

And through it all she grew tall and straight and brown. She could run like a partridge and fight like a wild-cat, at need. Her brown-black eyes shone in her dark warm skin with an eager light, and her calloused little claws of hands reached and took hold of all realities.

The boys respected her as a girl who wasn't afraid of bugs, and who could run, and throw a ball. Above all she was strong and well.

CHAPTER III
DANGEROUS DAYS

A farmer's daughter is exposed to sights and sounds which the city girl knows nothing of. Mysterious processes of generation and birth go on before the eyes of the farm child, which only come as obscure whisperings to the city child of the same middle condition. And these happenings have a terrifying power to stir and develop passions prematurely.

Rose heard occasionally obscene words among the hands. She listened unperceived to the vulgar cackling of old women during afternoon calls. Before her eyes from the time of her toddling youth had proceeded the drama of animal life. She had seen it all; courtship, birth, death. Nothing escaped her keen, searching, inquisitive eyes. She asked her father about these dramatic and furious episodes of the barnyard, but he put her off, and she finally ceased to ask about them. She began to perceive they were considered of that obscure and unmentionable world of sin, with which men alone had proper right to deal.

When the girls of her age in the grasp of some gale of passion, danced about her shouting foul words in the unknowing way children have, she could not take part by word of mouth, though she felt the same savage, frenzied delight in it.

She learned early the hideous signs which pass in the country to describe the unnamable and the covert things of human life. She saw them scrawled on the fences, on school-house doors, and written on the dust of the road. There was no escaping them. The apparently shameful fact of sex faced her everywhere.

And yet through it all she lived a glad, free, wholesome life. Her blood was sweet and clean and kept off contagion. Her brown skin flushed with its unhindered current. She dipped into this obscure questionable world only momentarily, and came back to her father wholesome and happy, except occasionally when some outrageous gesture or word had stricken her into weeping.

Then her father told her not to mind; just be good and sweet herself, and it would help the others to be good too. He blundered sometimes and struggled for words, and talked in grotesque riddles, but she understood his meaning some way and was comforted.

She did not go to her aunt. She had heard her say coarse words and she did not care to go and tell her of these strange things. Her father was her hero and guide. She went to him as naturally as to a mother. It was a great thing for him to achieve, but he did not know it. He did not seek it. It was indeed thrust upon him. He would gladly have escaped from it, but Rose refused to listen to anyone else, so the puzzled and disturbed father continued to be her timorous guide as a matter of need.

He could not understand her quick perception – something seemed to rise in the child to help him explain. Germs of latent perception seemed to spring up like a conjuror's magic seed, here a kernel, there a tree. One by one obscure ideas rose from the deep like bubbles, and burst into thought in her conscious self. A hint organized in her brain long trains of sequential conceptions, which she had inherited with her sex. She did not require teaching on the most fundamental problems of her nature.

Rose began to work early, but her work, like her playing, was not that of other girls. As she never played with dolls, caring more for hobby-horses, so she early learned to do work in the barn. From taking care of make-believe stick horses she came easily to take care of real horses.

When a toddling babe she had moved about under the huge plow-horses in their stalls, and put straw about them, and patted their columnar limbs with her little pads of palms, talking to them in soft indefinite gurgle of love and command.

She knew how much hay and oats they needed, and she learned early to curry them, though they resented her first trials with the comb. She cared less for the cows and pigs, but before she was

ten she could milk the "easy" cows. She liked the chickens, and it was part of her daily duty to feed the hens and gather the eggs.

She could use a fork in the barn deftly as a boy by the time she was twelve, and in stacking times she handed bundles across the stack to her father. It was the variety of work, perhaps, which prevented her from acquiring that pathetic and lamentable stoop (or crook) in the shoulders and back which many country girls have in varying degree.

All things tended to make her powerful, lithe and erect. The naked facts of nature were hers to command. She touched undisguised and unrefined nature at all points. Her feet met not merely soil, but mud. Her hands smelled of the barn yard as well as of the flowers of the wild places of wood and meadow.

Meanwhile her comradeship was sweet to John Dutcher. He hardly knew his loss of a son so completely was he companioned by Rose. He had put far away the time when she should wear shoes and long dresses and become a "young lady."

"Let her be, as long as you can," he said to his sister. "She's a mighty comfort to me now, and she's happy; don't disturb her; time to wear long dresses and corsets'll come soon enough without hurryin' things."

CHAPTER IV
AN OPENING CLOVER-BLOOM

There are times in a child's life when it leaps suddenly into larger growth as the imprisoned bud blooms larger than its promise, when the green fist of its straining calyx loosens in the warm glow of a May morning. Knowledge comes to the child, especially all the subtler knowledge of time, of space, of love, in a vague, indefinite, unconscious way, developing out of the child's organic self precisely as the flower blooms.

This knowledge comes to definite knowledge for an instant only and then returns to the subconscious, waiting the next day of warm sun, shining water and smell of spring. Each time it stays longer, till at last the child can contemplate its own thought and finally express it. These times form our real life epochs.

One day in June, a party of the school children, with flashing tin pails and willow baskets, went up into the woods after the wild-wood strawberries. It was late June and the strawberries of the meadows and uplands were nearly gone. The roads were dusty, the pastures close-clipped.

Merry, bare-footed little creatures! They started forth in the early morning while the dew still flamed on the clover-leaves, and around each corn-hill the ground was still moist. The girls romped and picked wild flowers, the boys threw stones at the chipmunks on the fence, and tossed their tin pails in the air, performing feats of deftness in imitation of the circus-men, whom they had lately seen on the green at Tyre.

They entered the forest and kept on up the wood-road until it seemed as if they were explorers. They had the delicious, tremulous feeling of having penetrated into the primeval, where nothing but the birds and animals lived. On past cool deeps of poplar, where the mandrake grew, and the sweet fern spread its magnificent leaves. On until the strawberries appeared, growing in clumps on long swaying stems, pale scarlet globes of delicious tartness.

They fell to work mostly in pairs. Curly-haired Carl kept with Rose, and his sharp eyes and knowledge of the patch enabled them to fill their pails first; then they went about helping the others, whose voices babbled on like streams.

Everywhere the pink sun-bonnets and ragged straw hats bobbed up and down. Everywhere fresh voices. The sunlight fell in vivid yellow patches through the cool odorous gloom. Everywhere the faint odor of ferns and mandrakes and berries, and the faint rustle of leaves, as if the shadows of the clouds trampled the tree-tops.

There was something sweet and wild and primeval in the scene, and the children were carried out of their usual selves. Rose herself danced and romped, her eyes flashing with delight. Under her direction they all came together on a little slope, where the trees were less thick, and near a brook which gurgled through moss-covered stones.

"O, let's have our picnic here!"

"All right, let's!"

They made short work of the lunch they had. Their buttered biscuits were spread with berries and mixed with water from the brook, which the girls drank like the boys, that is, by lying down on their breasts and drinking as the hunter drinks. Their hunger eased they fell to games. Games centuries old. Games which the Skandinavians played in the edges of their pine forests. Games the English lads and lassies played in the oak-openings of middle-age England.

The little ones were ruled out after awhile and the five or six elder children (the oldest only fourteen), went on with their games, which told of love. They joined hands and circled about Carl, they sang:

"King William was King James' son,
And from the royal race he run,
Upon his breast he wore a star,
Which points away to a conquest far.
Go choose you east, go choose you west,
Go choose the one that you love best."

Carl selected Rose, as they all knew he would. They stood together now, holding hands.

"Down on this carpet you must kneel,"

(they knelt)

"As sure as the grass grows in the field.
Salute your bride with a kiss so sweet,"

(Carl kissed her gravely)

"Now you rise upon your feet."

Again they circled, and again a little bride and bridegroom knelt. The fresh young voices rang under the spaces of the trees, silencing the joy of the thrush. The flecking sunlight fell on their towsled hair and their flushed faces. They had forgotten home and kindred, and were living a strange new-old life, old as history, wild and free once more, and in their hearts something bloomed like a flower, something sweet shook them all, something unutterable and nameless, something magnificent to attain and sorrowful to lose.

When they tired of "King William," they all flung themselves down on the grass and grew quiet. Some of the girls made wreaths of flowers strung on grass stems, while the boys studied the insects under the chips and stumps, or came slyly behind the girls and stuck spears of fox-tail down their necks. Some of them rolled down the bank. Carl, when he was tired of this, came and lay down by Rose, and put his head in her lap. Other bridegrooms did the same with their brides. Some of the boys matched violets, by seeing which would hook the other's head off.

Silence fell on them. Some passion thrilled Rose as she looked down into Carl's sunny blue eyes. She brushed his hair as he looked up at the clouds sailing above the trees like wonderful mountains of snow.

She was thirteen years of age, but prophecy of womanhood, of change, of sorrow, was in her voice as she said slowly, a look not childish upon her face:

"I'd like to live here forever, wouldn't you, Carl?"

"I guess we'd have to build a house," said Carl, the practical one.

She felt a terrible hunger, a desire to take his head in her arms and kiss it. Her muscles ached and quivered with something she could not fathom. As she resisted she grew calm, but mysteriously sad, as if something were passing from her forever. The leaves whispered a message to her, and the stream repeated an occult note of joy, which was mixed with sorrow.

The struggle of wild fear and bitter-sweet hunger of desire – this vague, mystical perception of her sex, did not last, to Rose. It was lost when she came out of the wood into the road on the way homeward. It was a formless impulse and throbbing stir far down below definite thought. It was sweet and wild and innocent as the first coquettish love-note of the thrush, and yet it was the beginning of her love-life. It was the second great epoch of her life.

CHAPTER V
HER FIRST PERIL

She came in contact during her school life with a variety of teachers. Most of the women she did not like, but one sweet and thoughtful girl had her unbounded love and confidence. She was from Madison, that was in itself a great distinction, for the capital of the state had come to mean something great and beautiful and heroic to Rose.

There it was the governor lived. There the soldiers went to enter the army, she remembered hearing the neighbors say, and her father's weekly paper was printed there. It was a great thing to have come from so far away and from Madison, and Rose hung about the door of the school house at the close of the first day, hoping the teacher would permit her to walk home by her side.

The young teacher, worried almost to despair over the arrangement of her classes, did not rise from her desk until the sun was low, rolling upon the tree-fringed ridge of the western bluff.

She was deeply touched to find this dusky-complexioned, bare-legged girl waiting for her.

"It was very nice of you, Rose," she said, and they walked off together. She talked about the flowers in the grass, and Rose ran to and fro, climbing fences to pick all sorts that she knew. She did not laugh when the teacher told her the botanical names. She wished she could remember them.

"When you grow up you can study botany too. But you must run home now, it's almost dark."

"I ain't afraid of the dark," said Rose stoutly, and she went so far Miss Lavalle was quite alarmed.

"Now you must go."

She kissed the child good-bye, and Rose ran off with her heart big with emotion, like an accepted lover.

It was well Rose turned to her for help, for most of her teachers had not the refinement of Miss Lavalle. They were generally farmers' daughters or girls from neighboring towns, who taught for a little extra money to buy dresses with – worthy girls indeed, but they expressed less of refining thought to the children.

One day this young teacher, with Rose and two or three other little ones, was sitting on a sunny southward sloping swell. Her hands were full of flowers and her great dark eyes were opened wide as if to mirror the whole scene, a valley flooded with light and warm with the radiant grass of spring. She was small and dark and dainty, and still carried the emotional characteristics of her French ancestry. She saw nature definitely, and did not scruple to say so.

"O, it is beautiful!" she said, as her eyes swept along the high broken line of the Western coulé ridge, down to the vast blue cliff where the river broke its way into the larger valley. "Children, see how beautiful it is!" The children stared away at it, but Rose looked into the teacher's eager face. Then her flowers dropped to the ground, the sunlight fell upon her with a richer glow, the dandelions shone like stars in a heaven of green, the birds and the wind sang a wild clear song in the doors of her ears, and her heart swelled with unutterable emotion. She was overpowered by the beauty of the world, as she had been by its immensity that day on the hill top with her father.

She saw the purple mists, the smooth, green, warm slopes dotted with dandelions, and the woodlands with their amber, and purple-gray, and gray-green foliage. The big world had grown distinctly beautiful to her. It was as though a gray veil had been withdrawn from the face of created things – but this perception did not last. The veil fell again before her eyes when the presence of the teacher was withdrawn. She felt the beautiful and splendid phases of nature and absorbed and related them to herself, but she did not consciously perceive except at rare moments.

The men, who taught in winter, were blunt and crude, but occasionally one of a high type came. Some young fellows studying law, or taking a course at some school, teaching to keep their place

or to go higher. These men studied nights and mornings out of great Latin books which were the wonder of the children. Such teachers appealed to the better class of pupils with great power, but excited rebellion in others.

It seemed a wonderful and important day to Rose, the first time she entered the scarred and greasy room in winter, because it was swarming with big girls and boys. She took her seat at one of the little benches on the north side of the room, where all the girls sat. At some far time the girls had been put on that, the coldest side of the house, and they still sat there; change was impossible.

Rose was a little bit awed by the scene. The big boys never seemed so rough, and the big girls never seemed so tall. They were all talking loudly, hanging about the old square stove which sat in the middle of a puddle of bricks.

She was an unimportant factor in the winter school, however, for the big boys and girls ignored the little ones, or ordered them out of their games.

In winter also her physical superiority to the other girls was less apparent, for she wore thick shoes and shapeless dresses and muffled her head and neck like the boys.

She plodded to school along the deep sleigh tracks, facing a bitter wind, with the heart of a man. It made her cry sometimes but there was more of rage than fear in her sobbing. She coughed and wheezed like the rest, but through it all her perfect lungs and sinewy heart carried her triumphantly.

The winter she was fourteen years of age she had for teacher a girl whose beautiful presence brought a curse with it. She was small and graceful, with a face full of sudden tears and laughter and dreams of desire. She fascinated the children, and the larger boys woke to a sudden savagery of rivalry over her, which no one understood. The older boys fought over her smiles and low-voiced words of praise.

The girls grew vaguely jealous or were abject slaves to her whims. The school became farcical in session, with ever-increasing play hours and ever-shortening recitations, and yet such was the teacher's power over the students they did not report her. She gathered the larger girls around her as she flirted with the young men, until children like Carl and Rose became a part of it all.

At night the young men of the neighborhood flocked about her boarding-place, absolutely fighting in her very presence for the promise which she withheld, out of coquettish perversity. She herself became a victim of the storm of passion which swept over the neighborhood. She went out to parties and dances every night and came languidly to school each morning. Most of the men of the district laughed, but the women began to talk excitedly about the stories they heard.

At school the most dangerous practices were winked at. The older boys did not scruple to put their arms about the teacher's waist as they stood by her side. All the reserve and purity which is organic in the intercourse of most country girls and boys seemed lost, and parties and sleigh-rides left remorse and guilt behind. There was something feverish and unwholesome in the air.

The teacher's fame mysteriously extended to Tyre, and when known libertines began to hitch their horses at the fence before her house and to enter into rivalry with the young men of the neighborhood, then the fathers of the coulé suddenly awoke to their children's danger, and turning the teacher away (tearful and looking harmless as a kitten), they closed and locked the school-house door.

Instantly the young people grew aware of their out-break of premature passion. Some of them, like Rose, went to their parents and told all they knew about it. John Dutcher received his daughter's answers to his questions with deep sorrow, but he reflected long before he spoke. She was only a child, not yet fifteen; she would outgrow the touch of thoughtless hands.

He sent for Carl, and as they stood before him, with drooping heads, he talked to them in his low, mild voice, which had the power of bringing tears to the sturdy boy's eyes.

"Carl, I thought I could trust you. You've done wrong – don't you know it? You've made my old heart ache. When you get old and have a little girl you may know how I feel, but you can't now. I don't know what I can say to you. I don't know what I am going to do about it, but I want you to

know what you've done to me – both of you. Look into my face now – you too, Rose – look into your old father's face!"

The scared children looked into his face with its streaming tears, then broke out into sobbing that shook them to their heart's center. They could not bear to see him cry.

"That's what you do to your parents when you do wrong. I haven't felt so bad since your mother died, Rose."

The children sobbed out their contrition and desire to do better, and John ended it all at last by saying, "Now, Carl, you may go, but I shall keep watch of you and see that you grow up a good, true man. When I see you're real sorry I'll let you come to see Rose again."

After Carl went out, Rose pressed into his ready arms. "I didn't mean to be bad, pappa."

"I know you didn't, Rosie, but I want you to know how you can make me suffer by doing wrong – but there, there! don't cry any more. If you are good and kind and true like your mother was you'll outgrow this trouble. Now run away and help get supper."

The buoyancy of a healthy child's nature enabled her to throw off the oppression of that dark day, the most terrible day of her life, and she was soon cheerful again, not the child she had been, but still a happy child. After a few weeks John sent for Carl to come over, and they popped corn and played dominos all the evening, and the innocency of their former childish companionship seemed restored.

CHAPTER VI
HER FIRST IDEAL

One June day a man came riding swiftly up the lanes, in a buggy with a gilded box. As he passed the school-house he flung a handful of fluttering yellow and red bills into the air.

"A circus! a circus!" was the cry as the boys rushed for the blowing sheets of paper. It was a circus, the annual "monstrous aggregation of Gregorian games and colossal cataracts of gilded chariots," and it was coming to Tyre.

The children read every word of those high sounding posters, standing in knots by the roadside. It was the mightiest event of their lives. Most of them had never been to a circus. Many had never been so far as Tyre. Some had, however, and they straightway became fountains of wisdom, and declaimed upon the splendors of other aggregations.

Rose looked at the lines of knights and ladies winding down the yellow broadside of the sheet, and wondered if she would ever see them.

The courier rode on. He flung a handful of the bills over into the corn-field where Carl was plowing corn with the hired man, and Carl straightway began to plan.

He flung a handful of the alluring yellow leaves into the bed of the wagon which poor old John Rapp was driving, and he sighed and wondered how he would raise the money to take the children down, and also he longed to see it himself. The whole county awoke to the significance of the event and began preparation and plans, though it was nearly three weeks away. An enormous distance it seemed to the boys and girls.

At school and at church it was talked of. The boys selected their girls, and parties of four or six were made up to go to Tyre, ten miles away, in the larger valley below. In some way, without words, Rose agreed to go with Carl. John Nixon and Ella Pierce made up the other couple. They were to go in a "bowery wagon."

The whole population awoke to pathetic, absorbing interest in the quality of the posters and the probable truth of the fore-word. The circus was the mightiest contrast to their slow and lonely lives that could be imagined. It came in trailing clouds of glorified dust and grouped itself under vast tents whose lift and fall had more majesty than summer clouds, and its streamers had more significance than the lightning.

It brought the throb of drum and scream of fife, and roar of wild beast. For one day each humdrum town was filled with romance like the Arabian Nights; with helmeted horsemen, glittering war maidens on weirdly spotted horses; elephants with howdahs and head-plates of armor, with lions dreadful, sorrowful, sedate and savage; with tigers and hyenas in unmanageable ferocity pacing up and down their gilded dens while their impassive keepers dressed in red, sat in awful silence amidst them.

There was something remote and splendid in the ladies who rode haughtily through the streets on prancing horses, covered with red and gold trappings. There was something heroic, something of splendid art in the pose of the athletes in the ring.

From the dust and drudgery of their farms the farm boys dreamed and dreamed of the power and splendor of the pageantry. They talked it each Sunday night as they sat up with their sweethearts. The girls planned their dresses and hats, and the lunch they were to take. Everything was arranged weeks ahead. Carl was to furnish one team, John the other; Ella was to bring cake and jelly and biscuit; Rose to take a chicken and a shortcake.

They were to start early and drive a certain route and arrive at the ground at a certain hour to see the parade. After the parade they were to take dinner at the hotel, and then the circus! No court ball ever thrilled a young girl's heart like this event.

It was trebly important to Rose. It was her first really long dress. It was her first going out into the world with an escort, and it was her first circus. She trembled with excitement whenever she thought of it, and sometimes burst into tears at the uncertainty of it. It might rain, she might be sick, or something might happen!

She worked away with feverish haste, trimming her hat and helping on her dress, which was to be white, trimmed with real lace from the store. Some dim perception of what it all meant to his girl, penetrated John Dutcher's head, and he gave Rose a dollar to buy some extra ribbon with, and told Mrs. Diehl to give the child a good outfit.

On the night before the circus Carl could not work in the corn. He drove furiously about the neighborhood on inconsequential errands. He called twice on Rose, and they looked into each other's face with transports of fear and joy.

"O, if it should rain!"

"It won't. I just know it's going to be fine. Don't you worry. I am the son of a prophet. I know it can't rain."

There was no real sleep for Rose that night. Twice she woke from an uneasy doze, thinking she heard the patter of rain, but listening close she knew it was only the rustle of the cottonwood trees about the house.

Her room was a little rough-plastered garret room, with an eastern window, and at last she saw the yellow light inter-filtrate the dark-blue of the eastern sky, and she rose and pattered about in her bare feet, while she put up her hair like a woman and slipped on her underskirt, stiff with starch, and then her dress, with its open-work sleeves and ruche of lace, threaded with blue ribbon. She moved about on her bare feet, rejoicing in the crisp rustle of her new clothing, and put on her wide hat with its hectic rose-buds and paris-green thick leaves. Her undistorted feet were the most beautiful of all, but she did not know that.

She sat on the bed completely dressed, but hardly daring to move for fear of waking her aunt. She watched the yellow glow deepen to a saffron dome of ever-spreading light. She knew the weather signs herself, and she was sure the day was to be hot but clear. She did not fear the heat.

As she sat so, a feeling of joy, of realization of the abounding goodness and sweetness of living, made her want to thank something – to give praise. She moved her lips in a little prayer of thanks to the sun, as his first glittering rim of light came above the low hills.

"Rosie!" called Mrs. Diehl.

"I'm up," she replied, and hastily drew on her shoes and stockings. She took her hat in her hands and went down the stairs and through the little sitting room out to the door-step. She heard someone whistling. Then a shout of laughter – they were coming!

She had packed her basket the night before, and she stood ready at the gate when Carl and his companions drove up. They had four horses hitched to a large wagon, which was set about with branches of oak and willow. Carl was driving and Rose mounted to the front seat with him. He cracked his whip and they whirled away, leaving the old folks calling warnings after them.

The sun was just rising, the dew was still globed on the wild roses. The wagon rumbled, the bower over their heads shook with the jar of the wheels. The horses were fresh and strong and the day was before them. Rose felt something vague and sweet, something that laved the whole world like sunlight. She was too happy to sing. She only sat and dreamed. She felt her clothes, but she was no longer acutely conscious of them.

Carl was moved too, but his emotion vented itself in shouts and cheery calls to the horses, and to the pistol-like cracking of his whip.

He looked at her with clear-eyed admiration. She abashed him a little by her silence. She seemed so strangely womanly in that pose, and the glow of her firm arms through her sleeve was alien, somehow.

The road led around hill sides, under young oak trees, across dappled sands, and over little streams where the horses stopped to drink. It was like some world-old idyl, this ride in a heavy rumbling wagon; it led to glory and light, this road among the hills.

Rounding a long low line of bluffs they caught the flutter of flags in Tyre, and saw the valley spotted with other teams, crawling like beetles down the sandy river roads. The whole land seemed to be moving in gala dress toward Tyre. Everywhere appeared the same expectancy, the same exultation between lovers.

Carl pulled up with a flourish at the wooden porch of the Farmers' Hotel, and the girls alighted and went into the parlor, while the boys took the horses into a back alley and gave them their oats and hay in the end of the box.

As Rose walked into the parlor, filled with other girls and young men, the proud consciousness of her clothes came back to her, and she carried herself with a lift of the head, which made her dark gipsy-like face look haughty as a young queen's. She knew her dress was as good as any other there, and she had no need to be ashamed, and besides it was her first long dress, and she wore low shoes.

The boys came bustling back and hurried the girls out on the sidewalk. "They're coming!" they cried breathlessly, as a far-off burst of music came in on a warm puff of wind.

On they came, a band leading the way. Just behind, with glitter of lance and shine of helmet, came a dozen knights and fair ladies riding spirited chargers. They all looked strange and haughty and sneeringly indifferent to the cheers of the people. The women seemed small and firm and scornful, and the men rode with lances uplifted looking down at the crowd with a haughty droop in their eyelids.

Rose shuddered with a new emotion as they swept past. She had never looked into eyes like those. They had wearied of all splendor and triumph, those eyes. They cared nothing for flaunt of flag or blast of bugle. They rode straight out of the wonder and mystery of the morning to her. They came from the unknown spaces of song and story beyond the hills.

The chariots rumbled by almost unheeded by Rose. She did not laugh at the clown jiggling by in a pony-cart for there was a face between her and all that followed. The face of a bare-armed knight, with brown hair and a curling mustache, whose proud neck had a curve in it as he bent his head to speak to his rearing horse. He turned his face toward where Rose stood, and her soul fluttered, and her flesh shrank as if from fire, but he rode on. His face was fine, like pictures she had seen. It was a pleasant face, too proud, but not coarse and stern like the others.

The calliope, (a musical monster, hideous as the hippopotamus) and the dens of beasts went past without arousing her interest; then the open cage of lions rolled by with a trainer carelessly seated on a camp stool amid his dun-colored monsters. His gaudy red-and-gold continental coat and his impassive face made a deep impression on her. At last the procession passed, carrying with it swarms of detached boys and girls, whose parents fearfully called after them and unavailingly plead with them to come back as they broke away.

"O, I wish it would all come by again!" sighed Ella.

"So do I," said Carl.

Rose remained silent. Somehow those knights and ladies dwarfed all else. She did not look forward to eating a hotel dinner with the same pleasure now, but was eager to get to the tent, whose pennants streamed above the roofs of the houses.

The hotel swarmed with farmer folks, whose loud voices uttered shouts of satisfaction over the promise of the parade. It was the best ever seen in the town.

"Right this way, ladies and gentlemen," said the landlord, as he ushered Carl's party down to a table at the end of the dining-room.

Rose felt a thrill of delight; she was a grown-up person at last. This landlord recognized her assumption and it made the dinner almost enjoyable. She saw no one better dressed than herself, and she had a feeling that she was good to look at. She was really more beautiful than she knew. A city

drummer sitting at another table eyed her all through the meal with breathless admiration. Her health and color, and the firm lines of her nose and chin were especially attractive.

They all ate with unusual formality, using their forks instead of knives for their pie, and otherwise trying to seem citified. Ella laughed at the antics John cut up over his fork, and the sly digs that he gave Carl, who chased the crust of his pie around his plate with a fork and at last gave it up and seized it with his fingers.

No one noticed these pranks, because everyone else was carrying on in much the same way. At length they rose and returned to the parlor, where they sat about on the cheap red plush chairs and waited for 1 o'clock.

"Well, it's about time to go," said Carl, on one of his re-entries from the street. "Gee-Whittaker! but it's hot out there!"

"It'll be cool under the tent."

"Well, come on."

Out on the street they joined the stream of lovers like themselves, moving hand in hand down the walk, assaulted by cries of lemonade, candy and fruit hucksters.

The sun beat upon their heads; a dust arose from the feet of the passing teams and settled upon the white dresses of the girls, and sank through the meshes of their sleeves and gathered in the moist folds of their ruches. They moved on rapidly toward the clanging band, the flutter of the pennants and the brazen outcries of the ticket-takers.

On to the square before the tents, thronged with innumerable people, an avenue of side-shows faced them like a gauntlet to be run. Before each flapping sign of fat woman, or snake charmer, stood a man who cried in strange, clanging, monotonous and rhythmical voice:

"You still have a half an hour, ladies and gentlemen, before the great show opens. Come in and see the wonders of the world."

Before the ticket wagon a straggling, excited crowd wrestled, suspicious, determined, hurried. Leaving their girls in the more open space, the boys drew deep breaths of resolution and plunged into the press with set, determined faces.

They returned soon, hot, disarranged but triumphant. "Come on, girls."

They moved upon the main entrance, where a man stood snatching at the tickets which were handed to him. He was humorous, and talked as he pushed the people in.

"Hurry up, old man; trot close after your mother. Have your tickets ready, everybody. Yes, right this way, uncle. Bless your dear little face – right ahead. H'y'ere, bub, this ticket's no good! – Oh, so it is, I didn't see the right side – get on quick."

As Rose passed him he said, "You go in free, my dear," and resumed his bawling cry, "Have your tickets ready."

Under the tent! Rose looked up at the lifting, tremulous, translucent canvas with such awe as the traveler feels in St. Peter's dome. Her feet stumbled on, while she clung to Carl's hand without knowing it. O, the enormous crowds of people, the glitter and change of it all!

They followed in the stream which flowed around the circle of animal dens, and Rose silently looked at all she saw. The others laughed and exclaimed, but she did not. Everything seemed inexplicable and mysterious, and roused confusing trains of thought.

She saw the great tigers, and caught the yellow-green sheen of their eyes. She saw the lions rise like clouds of dust in their corners, silent as mist and terrible as lightning. She looked at the elephant and wondered how he could live and be so like the toy elephants she had at home. On past shrieking tropical birds and grunting, wallowing beasts, and chattering crowds of people she moved, without a word, till they came around to the circus entrance, and then she lifted her eyes again around the great amphitheater.

"*Peanuts, peanuts here, five a bag!*"

"Here's your lemonade, cool and fresh."

On all sides brazen-voiced young men were selling, at appalling prices, sticks of candy, glasses of lemonade, palm-leaf fans and popcorn balls. There was something about them that frightened her, and she walked a little closer to Carl.

They heard familiar voices call and saw some young people from their coulé, and so clambered up where they sat. The boards were narrow and the seats low, but nobody minded that, for that was part of the circus.

They were settled at last and ready to enjoy all that came. Two or three volunteered to say: "This is great! the best place to see 'em come in." Then they passed the peanut bag in reckless liberality.

Rose sat in a dream of delight as the band began to play. It was an ambitious band and played operatic selections with modulations, and it seemed to Rose to be the most splendid music in the world. All other bands she had heard played right along tum-tummy tum-tummy tummy, tummy-tum. This band sang and talked and whispered and dreamed. It shook her like a stallion's neigh, and soothed her like the coo of a dove on the barn roof.

She heard nothing that was said about her, and she did not know she sat squeezing Carl's arm.

People streamed by in enormous crowds. Ladies in elegant dresses, and hats such as she had never seen before. Handsome young men went by, and yet she gave them no second look. They were like figures in a dream.

At last the band blared an announcing note, and the uniformed attendants filed into the ring and took positions at set points like sentries. Then the music struck into a splendid galop, and out from the curtained mysteries beyond, the knights and ladies darted, two and two, in glory of crimson and gold, and green and silver. At their head rode the man with the brown mustache.

They came around into position, and then began a series of bewildering changes, directed by her knight, whose shout dominated the noise of the horses and the blare of the band, with hollow wild sound.

They vanished as they came, and then came the clowns, and tricks and feats of strength. The iron-jawed woman lifted incredible weights; the Japanese jugglers tossed cannon-balls, knives and feathers; the baby elephant stood on his head – and then suddenly six men dressed in tights of blue and white and orange ran into the ring, and her hero led them.

He wore blue and silver, and on his breast was a rosette. He looked a god to her. His naked limbs, his proud neck, the lofty carriage of his head, made her shiver with emotion. They all came to her lit by the white radiance; they were not naked, they were beautiful, but *he* was something more.

She had seen naked boys, and her own companions occasionally showed themselves naked and cowering before her, but these men stood there proud and splendid. They invested their nakedness with something which exalted them. They became objects of luminous beauty to her, though she knew nothing of art.

As she grew clearer-eyed, she saw that one was a little too short, another too lean, but he of the rosette was perfect. The others leaped, with him, doing the same feats, but as distances were increased, and the number of camels and horses grew, the others stood by to see him make his renowned double somersault over a herd of animals. When the applause broke out she joined it, while her temples throbbed with emotion. To see him bow and kiss his fingers to the audience was a revelation of manly grace and courtesy. He moved under the curtain, bowing still to the cheering crowd.

Once more he came back later on, leading a woman by the hand. She too was in tights throughout, and like him she walked with a calm and powerful movement, but she seemed petty beside him.

Something new seized upon Rose's heart, a cold contraction that she had never felt, and her teeth pressed together. She wondered if the woman were his wife.

The woman seized a rope with her right arm and was drawn to the tent roof. He took a strap in his mouth and was drawn to his trapeze also. There, in mid-air, they performed their dangerous evolutions. It was all marvelous and incredible to the country girl.

She heard him clap his hands, then his glorious voice rang above the music, and the lithe figure of his companion launched itself through the air, was caught by the shoulders in his great hands, thence with a twist he tossed her, and hooked her by the hands.

Each time, the blood surged into Rose's throat as if to suffocate her. A horrible fear that was a pleasure, some way, rose and fell in her. She could not turn away her head. She must look.

She was a powerful girl, and the idea of fainting had never come to her, but when at the conclusion, he dropped in a revolving ball into the net far beneath, she turned sick and her eyes seemed to whirl in their sockets. Then as he leaped to the ground, bowing and smiling, the blood rushed back to her face, and the perspiration stood like rain on her face.

Thereafter riders came, and the clowns capered, and the ring-master cracked his whip and she enjoyed it, but it was an after-climax. She saw it, but saw it dimly. Nothing but the lions and their trainers aroused her to applause. Her brain was full. It was a feast of glories and her very hunger made her lay hold upon the first that came, to the neglect of what came after.

At last the brazen, resounding voice of the ring-master announced the last of the show, and the audience arose and moved out in a curious sort of a hush, as if in sorrow to think it was all over, and the humdrum world was rushing back upon them.

Rose moved along in perfect silence, clinging to Carl's hand. Around her was the buzz of low speech, the wailing of tired and hungry babies and the clamor of attendants selling tickets for the minstrel show to follow.

Suddenly she perceived that her dress was wet with perspiration and grimy with dust. She saw all about her women with flushed faces and grimy hands, their hats awry and their brows wrinkled with trouble over fretful children. The men walked along with their coats over their arms, and their hats pushed back. The dust arose under their feet with a strange smell. Out in the animal tent the odor was stifling and Rose hurried Carl out into the open air.

Somehow it seemed strange to see the same blue sky arching the earth; things seemed exactly the same and yet Rose had grown older. She had developed immeasurably in those few hours. It took her some time to fully recover the use of her feet, and it took longer to get back a full realization of where she was.

The grass, crushed and trampled and littered with paper, and orange peel, gave out a fresh farm-like odor, that helped her to recover herself. She would not talk, she could not talk yet. She only urged them to go home. She wanted to get home to think.

As they climbed the slope on the other side of the river, they looked back at the tents with their wilted streamers, at the swarming bug-like teams and the ant-like human beings, and it seemed to Rose as if she should weep, so poignant was her sense of personal loss.

She knew something sweet and splendid and mystical was passing out of her life after a few hours' stay there. Her feeling of loss was none the less real because it was indefinable to her.

The others chattered about each part of the show, and shouted admiration about this and that feat, but Rose was silent. When they stopped at sunset beside a spring to eat their lunch she merely said:

"I don't feel hungry."

The others fell silent after a time, and they rode dreamily forward, with the roll of wheels making them sleepy and the trample of the horses' feet telling them how rapidly they were leaving their great day's pleasure behind them.

When Rose huddled into her little attic bed, her eyes were wide open, and her brain active as at noonday. There was no sleep for her then. Lying there in the darkness she lived it all over again; the flutter of flags, the wild voices, the blare of music, the chariots, the wild beasts, the knights and ladies, the surging crowds; but the crowning glory, the pictures which lingered longest in her mind were the splendid and beautiful men, whose naked majesty appealed to her pure wholesome awakening womanhood, with the power of beauty and strength combined, with sex and art both included.

These glorious, glittering graceful beings with their marvelous strength and bravery filled her with a deep sad hunger, which she could not understand. They came out of the unknown, led by her chosen one, like knights in Ivanhoe.

She fell asleep thinking of the one in blue and silver, and in her sleep she grew braver and went closer to him, and he turned and spoke to her, and his voice was like waters running, and his eyes shone some way into her eyes like a light.

When she rose the next day she was changed. She moved about the house dull and languid. Never before had she failed to sleep when her head touched the pillow. She managed to be alone most of the time, and at last her mind cleared. She began to live for him, her ideal. She set him on high as a being to be worshiped, as a man fit to be her judge.

In the days and weeks which followed she asked herself, "Would he like me to do this?" or she thought, "I must not do that. What would he think of me if he saw me now?" And every night when she went to sleep it was with the radiant figure in blue and silver before her eyes.

When the sunset was very beautiful, she thought of him. When the stars seemed larger in the blue sky, she could see the star upon his grand breast. She knew his name; she had the bill in her little box of trinkets, and she could take it out and read, "William De Lisle, the world-famous leader in ground and lofty tumbling, in his stupendous leap over two elephants, six camels and two horses."

In all the talk of the circus which followed among her companions, she took no part because she feared she might be obliged to mention his name. When others spoke his name she could feel a hot flush surge up all over her body and she trembled for fear some one might discover her adoration of him.

She went about with Carl and Rob as before, only she no longer longed for them; they seemed good, familiar comrades, but nothing more. To them she seemed stranger every day. Her eyes had lost their clear, brave look; they were dreamy black, and her lids drooped.

Vast ambitions began in her. She determined to be a great scholar. She would be something great for his sake. She could not determine what, but she, too, would be great. At first she thought of being a circus woman, and then she determined that was impossible.

She dreamed often of being his companion and coming on hand in hand with him, bowing to the multitude, but when she was drawn to the tent-roof, she awoke in a cold sweat of fear, and so she determined to be a writer. She would write books like Ivanhoe. Those were great days! Her mind expanded like the wings of a young eagle. She read everything; the *Ledger*, the *Weekly*, and all the dog-eared novels of impassioned and unreal type in the neighborhood.

In short, she consecrated herself to him as to a king, and seized upon every chance to educate herself to be worthy of him. Every effort was deeply pathetic, no matter how absurd to others. She took no counsel, allowed no confidants. She lived alone among her playmates.

This ideal came in her romantic and perfervid period, and it did her immeasurable good. It lifted her and developed her. It enabled her to escape the clutch of mere brute passion which seizes so many boys and girls at that age, and leads to destructive early marriages. It kept her out of reach of the young men of the neighborhood.

She did not refuse the pleasures of the autumn and the winter, only she did not seem so hearty in her enjoyment of the rides and parties. She rode with the young fellows on moonlit nights, lying side by side with them on the straw-filled bottom of the sleigh, and her heart leaped with the songs they sang, but it all went out towards her ideal; he filled the circle of her mind. The thought of him made the night magical with meaning. As she danced with Carl it was her hero's arm she felt. At night, when Carl left her on the door-step, she looked up at the stars and the sinking moon, and lifted her face in a wild vow, inarticulate – "I will be worthy of him!" That was the passionate resolution, but it did not reach to the definiteness of words.

As she worked about the house she took graceful attitudes, and wished he might see her; he would be pleased with her. The grace and power of her arm acquired new meaning to her. Her body,

she recognized, had something the same statuesque pose of his. In the secrecy of her room she walked up and down, feeling the splendid action of her nude limbs muscled almost like his. And all this was fine and pure physical joy. Her idea remained indefinite, wordless.

These were days of formless imaginings and ambitions. "I will do! I will do!" was her ceaseless cry to herself, but what could she do? What should she do?

She could be wise; that she would be. So she read. She got little out of her reading that she could make a showing of, but still it developed her. It made her dream great things, impossible things, but she had moments when she tried to live these things.

Meanwhile her manners changed. She became absent-minded, and seemed sullen and haughty to her companions at times. She never giggled like the rest of the girls. She had fine teeth, and yet her smile was infrequent. She laughed when occasion demanded, and laughed heartily, but she was not easily stirred to laughter.

Just in proportion as she ignored the young beaux, so they thronged about her. One or two of them eyed her with a look which made her angry. She took refuge in Carl's company, and so escaped much persecution, for Carl was growing to be a powerful young man, with fists like mauls, and was respected among the athletes of the neighborhood.

She did not realize that she would need at some time to settle with Carl. She accepted his company as a matter of course. He filled social requirements for the time being.

Her teacher that winter was a plaintive sort of a little middle-aged man, a man of considerable refinement, but with little force. Rose liked him, but did not respect him as she had two or three of the men who had filled the teacher's chair. She could not go to him for advice.

As the winter wore on the figure of "William De Lisle" grew dimmer, but not less beautiful. Her love for him lost its under-current of inarticulate expectancy; it was raised into a sentiment so ethereal it would seem a breath of present passion would scatter it like vapor, and yet it was immovable as granite. Time alone could change it. He still dominated her thought at quiet times, at dark when the stars began to shine, but in the daytime he was faint as a figure in a dream.

CHAPTER VII
ROSE MEETS DR. THATCHER

The school-house in Dutcher's coulé, like most country school-houses, was a squalid little den. It was as gray as a rock and as devoid of beauty as a dry goods box. It sat in the midst of the valley and had no trees, to speak of, about it, and in winter it was almost as snow-swept as the school-houses of the prairie.

Its gray clap-boarding was hacked and scarred with knife and stone, and covered with mud and foul marks. A visitor who had turned in from the sun-smit winter road paused before knocking and looked at the walls and the door with a feeling of mirth and sadness. Was there no place to escape the obscene outcome of sexual passion?

Dr. Thatcher had been a pupil here in this same school-house more than twenty years before, and the droning, shuffling sound within had a marvelous reawakening power. He was a physician in Madison now, and was in the coulé on a visit.

His knock on the door brought a timid-looking man to the door.

"I'd like to come in awhile," said the Doctor.

"Certainly, certainly," replied the teacher, much embarrassed by the honor.

He brought him the chair he had been sitting on, and helped his visitor remove his coat and hat.

"Now don't mind me, I want to see everything go on just as if I were not here."

"Very well, that's the way we do," the teacher replied, and returned to his desk and attempted, at least, to carry out his visitor's request.

A feeling of sadness, mingled with something wordlessly vast, came over the Doctor as he sat looking about the familiar things of the room.

He was in another world, an old, familiar world. His eyes wandered lovingly from point to point of the room, filled with whispering lips and shuffling feet and shock-heads of hair, under which shone bright eyes, animal-like in their shifty stare. The curtains, of a characterless shade, the battered maps, the scarred and scratched blackboards, the patched, precarious plastering, the worn floor on which the nails and knots stood like miniature mountains, the lop-sided seats, the master's hacked, unpainted pine desk, dark with dirt and polished with dirty hands, all seemed as familiar as his own face.

He sat there listening to the recitations in a dreamy impassivity. He was deep in the past, thinking of the days when to pass from his seat to the other side of the room was an event; when a visitor was a calamity – for the teacher; when the master was a tyrant and his school-room a ceaselessly rebellious kingdom.

As his eyes fell at last more closely upon the scholars; he caught the eyes of a young girl looking curiously at him, and so deep was he in the past, his heart gave a sudden movement, just as it used to leap when in those far-off days Stella Baird looked at him. He smiled at himself for it. It was really ludicrous; he thought, "I'll tell my wife of it."

The girl looked away slowly and without embarrassment. She was thinking deeply, looking out of the window. His first thought was, "She has beautiful eyes." Then he noticed that she wore her hair neatly arranged, and that her dress, though plain, looked tasteful and womanly about the neck. The line of her head was magnificent. Her color was rich and dark; her mouth looked sad for one so young. Her face had the effect of being veiled by some warm, dusky color.

Was she young? Sometimes as he studied her she seemed a woman, especially as she looked away out of the window, and the profile line of her face could be seen. But she looked younger when she bent her head upon her books, and her long eye-lashes fell upon her cheek.

His persistent study brought a vivid flush into her face, but she did not nudge her companion and whisper as another would have done.

"That is no common girl," the Doctor concluded.

He sat there while the classes were called up one after the other. He heard again these inflections, tones, perpetuated for centuries in the school-room, "The-cat-saw-a-rat."

Again the curfew failed to ring, in the same hard, monotonous, rapid, breathless sing-song, every other line with a falling inflection. The same failure to make the proper pause caused it to appear that "Bessie saw him on her brow."

Again the heavy boy read the story of the ants, and the teacher asked insinuatingly sweet questions.

"What did they do?"

"Made a tunnel."

"Yes! Now what *is* a tunnel?"

"A hole that runs under-ground."

"Very good! It says that the ant is a voracious creature. What does that mean?"

"Dunno."

"You don't know what a voracious creature is?"

"No, sir."

And then came the writing exercise, when each grimy fist gripped a pen, and each red tongue rolled around a mouth in the vain effort to guide the pen. *Cramp, cramp; scratch, scratch; sputter!* What a task it was!

The December afternoon sun struck in at the windows, and fell across the heads of the busy scholars, and as he looked, Dr. Thatcher was a boy again, and Rose and her companions were the "big girls" of the school. He was looking at Stella, the prettiest girl in the district, the sunlight on her hair, a dream of nameless passion in her eyes.

The little room grew wide as romance, and across the aisle seemed over vast spaces. Girlish eyes met his like torches in the night. The dusty air, the shuffle of feet, the murmuring of lips only added to the mysterious power of the scene.

There they sat, these girls, just as in the far-off days, trying to study, and succeeding in dreaming of love songs, and vague, sweet embraces on moonlight nights, beneath limitless star-shot skies, with sound of bells in their ears, and the unspeakable glory of youth and pure passion in their souls.

The Doctor sighed. He was hardly forty yet, but he was old in the history of disillusion and in contempt of human nature. His deep-set eyes glowed with an inward fire of remembrance.

"O pathetic little band of men and women," thought he, "my heart thrills and aches for you."

He was brought back to the present with a start by the voice of the teacher.

"Rose, you may recite now."

The girl he had been admiring came forward. As she did so he perceived her to be not more than sixteen, but she still had in her eyes the look of a dreaming woman.

"Rose Dutcher is our best scholar," smiled the teacher proudly as Rose took her seat. She looked away out of the window abstractedly as the teacher opened the huge geography and passed it to the Doctor.

"Ask her anything you like from the first fifty-six pages." The Doctor smiled and shook his head.

"Bound the Sea of Okhotsk," commanded the teacher.

Thatcher leaned forward eagerly – her voice would tell the story!

Without looking around, with her hands in her lap, an absent look in her eyes, the girl began in a husky contralto voice: "Bounded on the north – " and went through the whole rigmarole in the same way, careless, but certain.

"What rivers would you cross in going from Moscow to Paris?"

Again the voice began and flowed on in the same measured indifferent way till the end was reached.

"Good heavens!" thought the Doctor, "they still teach that useless stuff. But how well she does it!"

After some words of praise, which the girl hardly seemed to listen to, she took her seat again.

Rose, on her part, saw another man of grace and power. She saw every detail of his dress. His dark, sensitive face, and splendid slope of his shoulders, the exquisite neatness and grace of his collar and tie and coat. But in his eyes was something that moved her, drew her. She felt something subtile there, refinement and sorrow, and emotions she could only dimly feel.

She could not keep her eyes from studying his face. She compared him with "William De Lisle," not deliberately, always unconsciously. He had nothing of the bold beauty of her ideal. This man was a scholar, and he was come out of the world beyond the Big Ridge, and besides, there was mystery and allurement in his face.

The teacher called as if commanding a regiment of cavalry. "Books. *Ready!*" There was a riotous clatter, which ended as quickly as it begun.

Kling! They all rose. *Kling!* and the boys moved out with clumping of heavy boots and burst into the open air with wild whoopings. The girls gathered into little knots and talked, glancing furtively at the stranger. Some of them wondered if he were the County Superintendent of Schools.

Rose sat in her seat, with her chin on her clasped hands. It was a sign of her complex organization, that the effect of a new experience was rooted deep, and changes took place noiselessly, far below the surface.

"Rose, come here a moment," called the teacher, "bring your history."

"Don't keep her from her playmates," Thatcher remonstrated.

"O she'd rather recite any time than play with the others."

Rose stood near, a lovely figure of wistful hesitation. She had been curiously unembarrassed before, now she feared to do that which was so easy and so proper. At last she saw her opportunity as the teacher turned away to ring the bell.

She touched Thatcher on the arm. "Do you live in Madison, sir?"

"Yes. I am a doctor there."

She looked embarrassed now and twisted her fingers.

"Is it so very hard to get into the university?"

"No. It is very easy – it would be for you," he said with a touch of unconscious gallantry of which he was ashamed the next moment, for the girl was looking away again. "Do you want to go to the university?"

"Yes, sir, I do."

"Why?"

"O, because – I want to know all I can."

"Why? What do you want to do?"

"You won't tell on me, will you?" She blushed red as a carnation now. Strange mixture of child and woman, thought Thatcher.

"Why, certainly not."

They stood over by the blackboard; the other girls were pointing and snickering, but she did not mind them.

"I guess I won't tell," she stammered; "you'd laugh at me like everybody else – I know you would."

He caught her arm and turned her face toward his; her eyes were full of tears.

"Tell me. I'll help you."

His eyes glowed with a kindly smile, and she warmed under it.

"I want to write – stories – and books," she half whispered guiltily. The secret was out and she wanted to run away. The Doctor's crucial time had come. If he laughed! – but he did not laugh. He looked thoughtful, almost sad.

"You are starting on a long, long road, Rose," he said at last. "Where it will lead to I cannot tell – nobody can. What put that into your head?"

Rose handed him a newspaper clipping containing a brief account of "how a Wisconsin poetess achieved fame and fortune."

"Why, my dear girl," he began, "don't you know that out of ten thousand – " He stopped. She was looking up at him in expectation, her great luminous grey-brown eyes burning with an inward hungry fire which thrilled him.

"She may be the one in ten thousand, and I'll help her," he said to himself.

The bell ringing brought the boys clattering back into their seats, puffing, gasping, as if at last extremity. For a couple of minutes nothing could be done, so great was the noise.

While they were getting settled he said to her:

"If you want to go to the university you will have to go to a preparatory school. Here is my card – write to me when you get done here, and I'll see what can be done."

Rose went back to her seat, her eyes filled with a burning light, her hands strained together. This great man from Madison had believed in her. O, if he would only come home and see her father!

She painfully penciled a note and handed it to him as she came past to the blackboard. He was putting on his coat to go, but he looked down at the crumpled note, with its Spencerian handwriting.

"Please, sir, won't you come down and see pappa and ask him if I can't go to Madison?"

He looked at the girl, whose eyes, big and sombre and full of wistful timidity, were fixed upon him. Obeying a sudden impulse, he stepped to her side and said: "Yes, I'll help you; don't be troubled."

He stayed until school was out and the winter sun was setting behind the hills. Rose sat and looked at him with more than admiration. She trusted him. He had said he would help her, and his position was one of power in her fancy, and something in his face and dress impressed her more deeply than any man she had ever seen save "William De Lisle," her dim and shadowy yet kingly figure.

On his part he was surprised at himself. He was waiting a final hour in this school-room out of interest and curiosity in a country school girl. His was a childless marriage, and this girl stirred the parental in him. He wished he had such a child to educate, to develop.

The school was out at last, and, as she put on her things and came timidly towards him, he turned from the teacher.

"So you are John Dutcher's daughter? I knew your father when I was a lad here. I am stopping at the Wallace farm, but I'll come over a little later and see your father."

Rose rushed away homeward, full of deep excitement. She burst into the barn where John was rubbing the wet fetlocks of the horses he had been driving. Her eyes were shining and her cheeks were a beautiful pink.

"O, pappa, he said I ought to go to Madison to school. He said he'd help me go."

John looked up in astonishment at her excitement.

"Who said so?"

"Dr. Thatcher, the man who visited our school today. He said I'd ought to go, and he said he'd help me."

Her exultation passed suddenly. Somehow there was not so much to tell as she had fancied, and she suddenly found herself unable to explain the basis of her enthusiasm. The perceived, but untranslatable expression of the Doctor's eyes and voice was the real foundation of her hope, and that she had not definitely and consciously noted – to explain it was impossible. If her father could only have seen him!

"I guess you'd better wait awhile," her father said, with a smile, which Rose resented.

"He's coming tonight."

"Who's he?"

"Dr. Thatcher. He used to live here. He knows you."

John grew a little more intent on her news.

"Does! I wonder if he is old Stuart Thatcher's son? He had a boy who went east to school somewheres."

Rose went into the house and set to work with the graceful celerity which Mrs. Diehl called "knack."

"Rose, you can turn off work when you really want to, to beat anything I ever see."

Rose smiled and hummed a tune. Mrs. Diehl was made curious.

"You're wonderful good-natured, it seems to me. What's the reason, already?"

"We're going to have company."

"Who, for Peter's sake?"

"Dr. Thatcher."

"What's he come here for?"

"To see pappa," said Rose, as she rushed upstairs into her attic-room. It was cold up there, warmed only by the stove-pipe from the sitting-room, but she sat down and fell into a dream in which she recalled every look and word he had given her.

She came suddenly to herself, and began putting on her red dress, which was her company dress. When she came downstairs in her creaking new shoes Mrs. Diehl was properly indignant.

"Well! I declare. Couldn't you get along in your calico?"

"No, I couldn't!" Rose replied, with easy sharpness, which showed the frequent passages at arms between them.

When Thatcher came in with the teacher he was quite startled by the change in her. She looked taller and older and more intricate some way.

She took his hat and coat and made him at home in much better form than he had reason to think she knew. She on her part watched him closely. His manner at the table was a source of enlightenment to her. She felt him to be a strong man, therefore his delicacy and consideration meant much to her. It suggested related things dimly. It made her appreciate vaguely the charm of the world from whence he came.

Dr. Thatcher was not young, and his experience as a physician had added to his natural insight. He studied Rose keenly while he talked with John concerning the changes in the neighborhood.

He saw in the girl great energy and resolution, and a mental organization not simple. She had reason and reserve force not apprehended by her father. The problem was, should he continue to encourage her. Education of a girl like that might be glorious – or tragic! After supper John Dutcher took him into the corner, and, while Rose helped clear away the dishes, the two men talked.

"You see," John explained, "she's been talkin' about going on studyin' for the last six months. I don't know what's got into the girl, but she wants to go to Madison. I suppose her learnin' of that Bluff-Sidin' girl goin' has kind o' spurred her on. I want her to go to the high school at the Sidin', but she wants to go away" – he choked a little on that phrase – "but if you an' teacher here think the girl'd' ought to go, why, I'll send her."

The younger man looked grave – very grave. He foresaw lonely hours for John Dutcher.

"Well – the girl interests me very much, Mr. Dutcher. It's a strong point in her favor that she wants to go. Most girls of her age have little ambition beyond candy and new dresses. I guess it's your duty to send her. What she wants is the larger life that will come to her in Madison. The preparatory work can be done here at the Siding. I believe it is one of the accredited schools. Of course she will come home often, and when she comes to Madison, I will see that she has a home until she gets 'wunted,' as you farmers say."

The teacher came in at this point full of wild praise of Rose's ability. "She's great on history and geography. She knows about every city and river and mountain on the maps."

"She's always been great for geography," confirmed John. "Used to sit and follow out lines on the maps when she wasn't knee-high to a 'tater." A tender tone came into his voice, almost as if he

were speaking of a dead child. He too had a quick imagination, and he felt already the loss of his girl, his daily companion.

The matter was decided there. "You send her to me, when she gets ready, and I'll have Mrs. Thatcher look after her for a week or so, till we find her a place to stay."

Rose was in a fever of excitement. She saw the men talking there, and caught disconnected words as she came and went about the table. At last she saw Dr. Thatcher rise to go. She approached him timorously.

"Well, Rose, when you come to Madison you must come to our house. Mrs. Thatcher will be glad to see you." She could not utter a word in thanks. After he had gone Rose turned to her father with a swift appeal.

"Oh, pappa, am I going?"

He smiled a little. "We'll see when the time comes, Rosie."

She knew what that meant and she leaped with a joy swift as flame. John sat silently looking at the wall, his arm flung over the back of his chair. He wondered why she should feel so happy at the thought of leaving home, when to him it was as bitter as death to think of losing her for a single day out of his life.

Thenceforward the world began to open to Rose. Every sign of spring was doubly significant; the warm sun, the passing of wild-fowl, the first robin, the green grass, the fall of the frost, all appealed to her with a power which transcended words. All she did was only preparation for her great career beyond the Ridge.

She pictured the world outside in colors of such splendor that the romance of her story-papers seemed weak and pale.

Out there in the world was William De Lisle. Out there were ladies with white faces and heavy-lidded, haughty eyes, in carriages and in ball-rooms. Out there was battle for her, and from her quiet coulé battle seemed somehow alluring.

CHAPTER VIII
LEAVING HOME

As the time for leaving came on Rose had hours of depression, wherein she wondered if it were worth while. Sometimes it began when she noticed a fugitive look of sorrow on her father's face, and sometimes it was at parting with some of her girl friends, and sometimes it was at thought of Carl. She had spent a year in the Siding in preparation for the work in Madison, and the time of her adventure with the world was near.

Carl came to be a disturbing force during those last few weeks. He had been a factor in all of the days of her life. Almost without thought on her part she had relied upon him. She had run to him for any sort of material help, precisely as to a brother, and now he was a man and would not be easily set aside.

He generally drove her to meeting on Sunday, and they loitered on the shady stretches of the coulé roads. He generally put his arm around her, and she permitted it because it was the way all the young fellows did but she really never considered him in the light of a possible husband.

Most of the girls were precocious in the direction of marriage, and brought all their little allurements to bear with the same object in view which directs the coquetry of a city belle. At sixteen they had beaux, at seventeen many of them actually married and at eighteen they might often be seen riding to town with their husbands, covered with dust, clasping wailing babes in their arms; at twenty they were often thin and bent in the shoulders, and flat and stiff in the hips, sallow and querulous wives of slovenly, careless husbands.

Rose did not hold that Carl had any claim upon her. The incidents of two years before were lived down, both by herself and Carl, for as manhood and womanhood came to them they put away all that which they had done in the thoughtlessness of childhood. To Rose it was an unpleasant memory, because associated with her father's grief. She supposed Carl to feel in the same way about it, and so no allusion to it was ever made by any one.

But Carl was grown to be a great stalwart young fellow, with the blood and sinew of a man, and the passions of a man were developing in his rather thick head. The arm which he laid along the buggy seat was less passive and respectful of late. It clutched in upon her at times; though she shook herself angrily each time, he merely laughed.

So matters stood when she told him she was going away to school in Madison.

"That so?" he said, and not much else till the next Sunday. With all the week to think about it in, he began to ask himself in current slang, "Where do I come in?"

So the next time they drove together he tried again to tighten his arm about her while he said:

"I'll miss you, Rosie."

"So'll pap," she said.

There was a long pause, then he said: "What's the use o' going away anyhow? I thought you an' me was goin' to be married when we grew up."

She shook herself free. "We ain't grown up yet."

"I guess we won't never get our growth, then," he said with a chuckle; "you don't need that extra schoolin' any more'n I do."

They rode in silence down the beautiful valley, with the charm of early autumn lying over it.

"You mustn't go and forget me off there in Madison," he said, giving her a squeeze.

"Carl, you stop that! You mustn't do that! I'll jump out o' the buggy if you do that again!"

There was genuine anger in her voice.

"Why, it's all right, Rosie; ain't we engaged?"

"No, we're not, and we never will be, either."

There was a note in her voice that struck through even Carl's thick thought. He did not reply, but continued to dwell upon that reply until its entire meaning came to him. Then his face became pitiful to see. It was usually round and red, but now it looked long and heavy and bitter. He was so infertile of phrases he could only say:

"Then we might as well drive right back home."

"Well, you made me say it," she went on in a softer tone, being much moved by the change in his face. "I like you, Carl, but I'm not a-goin' to promise anything. I'll see when I come back, after I graduate."

They drove on. She was not much more of a talker than he, and so they rode in silence that was sullen on Carl's part. At the gate she relented a little. "Won't you come in, Carl?"

"No, I guess not," he said shortly, and drove off.

After she went in the house she felt more and more the injustice of her anger. "If he hadn't pinched me like that," she said to herself.

She went to work at her packing again, putting in things she would not possibly have any use for. As she worked the ache and weariness at her heart increased, and when they called her to supper the tears were falling again like a shower. It was a silent and miserable meal, though the doors and windows were open and the pleasant sounds of the farm-yard came in, and the red light of the setting sun shone in magically warm and mellow.

John ate slowly, his eyes fixed on his plate. Rose ate not at all and looked out of the window, with big tears rolling childishly down her cheeks. She didn't want to go at all now. Her home seemed all at once so comfortable and happy and safe!

John looked up and saw her tears, and immediately he was choked and could not eat.

"There, there! Rosie, don't cry. We'll be all right, and you'll be back almost 'fore you know it. June comes early in the summer, you know." They were both so childlike they did not consider it possible to come home before the year was up. She came around and knelt down by his side and buried her face on his knees.

"I wish I hadn't promised to go," she wailed; "I don't want to go one bit. I want to stay with you."

He understood her feeling and soothed her and diverted her, though tears would have been a relief to him.

She went with him out to the barn, and she cried over the bossies and the horses, and said good-by to them under her breath, so that her father might not hear.

When she went to bed she lay down disconsolate and miserable. O it was so hard to go, and it was hard not to go. Life was not so simple as it had seemed before. Why did this great fear rise up in her heart? Why should she have this terrible revulsion at the last moment? So she thought and thought. Her only stay in the midst of chaos was Dr. Thatcher. William De Lisle was very far away, like a cold white star.

Just as she made up her mind that she could not sleep, she heard her father call her.

"Rose, time to get up!"

Her heart contracted with a sharp spasm that almost made her scream. The time had come for action – momentous, irrevocable action, like Napoleon's embarking from Elba for France.

It was very chill and dark. She rose and groped about for a light. Her teeth chattered with cold and it seemed to her she was going to be sick. She dressed hurriedly and went down.

John and her aunt were seated at breakfast. She slipped into her seat, white and silent. It was still dark and the lighted lamps made it seem like a midnight meal.

John was strenuously cheerful. "We have to get up early if we get that seven o'clock train," he said.

"Better take some coffee anyhow," urged Mrs. Diehl.

"O, I can't eat a thing," Rose insisted.

"Don't worry her, sis," interposed John. "She'll feel like it later."

While John went to get the team Rose got on her things and walked about, uttering a little moaning sound, like a babe in delirium. It was terrible to hear her and Mrs. Diehl lost patience at last.

"Stop that fuss! Good land! anybody'd think you was goin' to die dead as a hammer, the way you take on, and after all the time we've had gettin' you ready. I declare to goodness I never see such a young'un in all my born days. I will be glad to get rid of you!"

This was good strong medicine to Rose, and she uttered no more of her grief. She punished her aunt by refusing to say good-bye at the door, which grieved John very much.

"You folks had a tiff this morning a'ready?"

It was cold and damp. The wind pushed against their faces like the touch of wet palms. The horses splashed along in pools of water, and out of the dim light the hills rose against the sky full of soft sprawling rain-clouds.

They rode in silence. Rose saw no more of the splendid visions of the world. It was all dark and rainy ahead. Home, and peace, and comfort were all behind her. She was so miserable it seemed as if she must cry out, but her aunt's contemptuous words helped her to silence.

John talked a little about the trains on the road, and the weather, but talk was an effort to him also. As he rode he thought of it all again. He felt as if he were losing his heart, but he did not waver.

He helped her on the cars and then stooped and hugged her hard without kissing her, and so stumbled out again, while she sat white and rigid, breathing hard.

The sun came out after a little, and covered the earth with a glory that found its way into the girl's heart. She ceased to sob, and the ache passed out of her throat, although the shadow still hung in her eyes.

The car interested her. It seemed a palace and of enormous size. She figured out the number of people it would hold, and wondered how the seats which were turned the other way came to be so. The car was mainly occupied by men in careless clothing. Everybody seemed sleepy and unkempt. She wondered where they all came from, and so speculating, she lost something of her poignant sorrow.

Then came one moment of quiet elation. She was going out into the world! the enormous, the incredible had happened! She was going to Madison, the state capital. The speed of the train, which seemed to her very great, aided her to realize how swiftly she was getting into the world. The fields and farms whirled by in dizzying fashion, and the whistle of the engine was like the furious, defiant neigh of a rushing horse. It was all on a scale more splendid than her dreams.

In the midst of her exultant moment the brakeman came through and eyed her with the glare of a sex-maniac. She felt as if a hot iron had touched her flesh, and she shrank back into herself, like a scared mollusk. The man passed on, but her exultation was gone.

She noticed that the hills grew lower as they sped southward, and queer rocks rose squarely out of the flat lands, which were covered with wild swamps of small trees, out of which long skeletons of dead pines lifted with a desolate effect.

There were several tunnels, and every time they went through one Rose clung to the seat in terror. Some young men in the rear of the car smacked their lips to represent kisses, and laughed boisterously afterward, as if that were a very good joke indeed.

The conductor, when he came through the next time, eyed her closely and smiled broadly. She did not understand why he should smile at her. After he had been through the car several times he came and sat down by her.

"Nice day, ain't it? Live in Madison?"

"No, sir," she replied, looking away. She did not want to say more, but some power made her add, "I am going to school there."

He seemed pleased.

"Ah, hah! Going to the university?"

"Yes, sir."

"O, I see." He put his knee against the back of the seat in front of her and took an easy position.

"It's a nice town. Wish I could stop off and help you find a boarding-place."

The brakeman, coming through, winked at the conductor as if to say: "I like your 'mash,'" and the terror and shame of her position flashed over Rose, flushing her from head to foot. Her eyes filled with angry tears, and she looked out of the window, not knowing what to do. She was so helpless here, for she was out in the world alone.

The conductor went on serenely, knowing well how scared and angry she was.

"Yes, sir; it's a fine little town. Great place for boating, summer or winter. You'll see a hundred ice-boats out on Monona there all at once. I've got a cousin there who has a boat. He'd be glad to take you out if I'd tell him about you."

"I don't want to know him," she said, in what she intended to be a fierce tone, but which was a pitifully scared tone.

The conductor saw the brakeman looking at him and in order to convey the impression that he was getting on nicely he bent forward and looked around into her face.

"O, you'd like him first rate."

Rose would have screamed, or burst out into some wild action had not the engine whistled. This gave the conductor an excuse to give the talk up for the moment.

"She's a daisy and as green as grass," he said to the brakeman. Her innocence seemed to place her in his hand.

For the next hour they persecuted the girl with their low presences. First one and then the other came along the aisle and sat down beside her. And when she put her valise there, blocking the seat, the brakeman sat on the armrest and tormented her with questions to which she gave no answer.

Just after Pine City she heard a cool, firm woman's voice ask: "May I sit with you?"

She looked up and made room for a handsome, middle-aged woman, in a neat traveling dress.

"It's a shame!" she said. "I've just got in, but I saw at once how those men were torturing you. Strange no one in the car could see it and take your part."

Rose turned to her gratefully, and laid her head on the lady's stalwart shoulder.

"There, there, no harm done! You must learn to expect such things from some men. It would be libelous on the brutes to call them beasts." She said a great many things which Rose hardly understood, but her presence was strong and helpful. Rose liked her very much.

"How far are you going?"

Rose told her in a few words.

"Ah, are you? You could not have made a better choice. Who sends you there – pardon me?"

"Dr. Thatcher."

"Dr. Thatcher! Well, well, how things come about. I know the Doctor very well."

"Do you? I'm going to live there for a while."

Rose was smiling now.

"Well, you couldn't be more fortunate. You'll get into the most progressive home in the city."

From this on they had a royal good time. Rose grew happier than she had been for weeks. There was something strangely masterful about this woman in spite of her sweet smile and soft gray eyes.

When the conductor came down the aisle again she met his eye with a keen, stern glance.

"Young man, I shall have you discharged from this road."

The astonished cur took her card, and when he read the name of a famous woman lawyer of Milwaukee his face fell.

"I didn't mean any harm."

"I know better. I shall see Mr. Millet, and see that he makes an example of you."

Rose was awed by her calm and commanding voice.

"It has been our boast that our girls could travel from east to west in our broad land, and be safe from insult, and I'm not going to let such a thing pass."

She returned to her grave sweet mood presently, and began to talk of other things.

As they neared the town where they were to part company, the elder woman said:

"Now, my dear, I am to get off here. I may never see you again, but I think I shall. You interest me very much. I am likely to be in Madison during the year, and if I do I will see you. I am getting old though, and things of this life are uncertain to us with gray hair. I like that forehead on you, it tells me you are not to be a victim to the first man who lays his hand on you. Let me give one last word of advice. Don't marry till you are thirty. Choose a profession and work for it. Marry only when you want to be a mother."

She rose. "You don't understand what I mean now, but keep my words in your mind. Some day you will comprehend all I mean – good-bye." Rose was tearful as Mrs. Spencer kissed her and moved away.

Rose saw her on the steps and waved her hand back at her as the train drew away. Her presence had been oppressive in spite of her kindness, and her last words filled the girl's mind with vague doubts of life and of men. Everything seemed forcing her thoughts of marriage to definiteness. Her sex was so emphasized, so insisted upon by this first day's experience in the world, that she leaned her head against the window and cried out: "O, I wish I was dead."

But the train shot round the low green hills fringed with the glorious foliage of the maples, the lake sparkled in the afternoon's sun, the dome of the capitol building loomed against the sky, and the romance and terror of her entry into the world came back to her, driving out her more morbid emotions. She became again the healthy country girl to whom Madison was a center of art and society and literature.

CHAPTER IX
ROSE ENTERS MADISON

The train drew up to a long platform swarming with people, moving anxiously about with valises in hand, broad-hatted and kindly; many of them were like the people of the coulé. But the young hackmen terrified her with their hard, bold eyes and cruel, tobacco-stained mouths.

She alighted from the car, white and tremulous with fear, and her eyes moved about anxiously. When they fell upon Thatcher the blood gushed up over her face, and her eyes filled with tears of relief.

"Ah, here you are!" he said with a smile, as he shook her hand and took her valise. "I began to fear you'd been delayed."

She followed him to the carriage with down-cast eyes. Her regard for him would not permit her to say a word, even when they were seated together in the carriage and driving up the street. Her breath came so quick and strange the Doctor noticed it.

"A little bit excited about it, aren't you?" he smilingly said. "I remember how I felt when I went to Chicago the first time. I suppose this seems like Chicago to you. How did you leave the people in the coulé, all well?"

"Yes, sir," she replied without looking up.

"Well, now you are about to begin work. I've got everything all arranged. You are to stay with us for the present at least. My niece is with us and you will get along famously I know. How do you like my horse?" he asked, in his effort to get her to speak.

She studied the horse critically.

"First rate!" she said at last.

He laughed. "Well, I am glad you like him, for I know you are a judge. He is a pretty good stepper, too, though he hasn't quite enough fling in his knees, you notice. I'll let you drive him some time."

He drew up before a pretty cottage, set in the midst of a neat lawn. It was discouragingly fine and handsome to the girl. She was afraid it was too good for her to enter.

A very blonde young girl came dancing out to the block.

"O Uncle Joe, did Rose – " Rose suddenly appeared.

"This is Rose. Rose, this is our little chatter-box."

"Now, Uncle Joe! Come right in, Rose. I'm going to call you Rose, mayn't I?"

Mrs. Thatcher, a tall thin woman, welcomed Rose in sober fashion, and led the way into the little parlor, which seemed incredibly elegant to the shy girl.

She sat silently while the rest moved about her. There was a certain dignity in this reserve, and both Mrs. Thatcher and Josie were impressed by it. She was larger and handsomer than either of them and that gave her an advantage, though she did not realize that. She was comparing in swift, disparaging fashion her heavy boots with their dainty soft shoes, and wondering what she could do to escape from them.

"Josie, take her right up to her room," said Mrs. Thatcher, "and let her get ready for dinner."

"Yes, come up, you must feel like a good scrub."

Rose flushed again, wondering if her face had grown grimy enough to be noticeable.

The young girl led Rose into a pretty room with light green walls, and lovely curtains at the windows. There were two dainty little beds occupying opposite corners.

"We're to occupy this room together," said Josie. "This is my dressing case and that's yours."

Rose saw at once Josie had given her the best one. Josie bustled about helping her lay off her things, pouring water for her and talking on with gleeful flow.

"I'm awful glad you've come. I know we'll be just as thick! I wish you were in my classes though, but you won't be, so Doctor says. Don't you think this is a nice room?"

Rose washed her hands as quickly as possible because they looked so big and dingy beside the supple whiteness of Josephine's. She felt dusty and coarse and hopeless in the midst of this exquisite room, the most beautiful room she had ever seen.

Her eyes moving about fell upon a picture which had the gleam of white limbs in it. Josephine followed her look: "O, that's young Samson choking the lion. I just love that; isn't he lovely?"

Rose blushed and tried to answer but could not. The beautiful splendid limbs of the young man flamed upon her with marvelous appeal. It was beautiful, and yet her training made her think it somehow not to be talked about.

Josephine led the way downstairs into the little parlor, which was quite as uncomfortably beautiful as the bedroom. The vases and flowers, and simple pictures, and the piano, all seemed like the furnishings of the homes she had read about in stories.

But dazed as she was she kept her self-command, at least she kept silence and sat in sombre, almost sullen dejection amid it all. Mrs. Thatcher hardly knew what to think of her, but the Doctor comprehended her mood better for he had passed through such experiences himself. He talked to her for a few minutes about her plans, and then they went out to dinner.

Rose entered the dining-room with a great fear in her heart. She longed to run away and hide.

"O I don't know anything!" was the bitter cry welling up in her throat again and again, and she nearly cried out upon the impulse.

The Doctor liked to have his dinner at one, and so Rose found two knives, and two forks at her plate, and two spoons also. She had read in stories of banquets, and she saw that this was to be her greatest trial. She sat very stiff and silent as the soup was brought on by the Norwegian girl.

She took the plate as it was handed her, and handed back the one which was turned down with the napkin on top of it. The Norwegian girl smiled broadly and handed them both back. Then Rose saw her mistake and the hot blood swept over her brown face in a purple wave.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.